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SUBJECT: SENATE ELECTIONS: DEMOCRATIC MISSTEP?

REF: A) Dakar 1283, B) Dakar 1522, C) Dakar 1541

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On August 19, local officials and Members of Parliament elected 35 senators via indirect suffrage. The ruling PDS (Democratic Party of Senegal) won 34 out of the 35 "contested" seats. The only opposition member in the Senate will be a member of AJ/PADS, the African Party for Democracy and Socialism. The election was a non-event. The average Senegalese views the new Senate as a vehicle to provide jobs and perks to the ruling political class. The main opposition parties boycotted the elections condemning the fact that out of the 100 members of the future Senate, President Wade will appoint 65. They are also demanding a national political dialogue to build a new consensus around electoral issues, the reform of institutions and the promotion of good governance. Wade has so far refused such a dialogue and continues his unilateral reform of institutions. This dialogue deficit with the opposition, the increase in the cost of living, and the uncertainties around Wade's succession has the potential to undermine Senegal's democracy and stability. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) On August 28, 2007, the Constitutional Court officially ratified the results of the August 19 election confirming that the PDS had indeed won 34 out of the 35 seats up for grabs. Officially 9,624 valid votes were cast out of a possible pool of 13,384 eligible voters. Of that number the PDS received 8,177 votes.

A "SHAMEFUL" VICTORY

3. (SBU) Speaking on behalf of the opposition, who once again decided to boycott the elections, Ousmane Tanor Dieng, leader of the Socialist party noted: "this Senate is sad for our democracy; it is a shameful and empty institution." Dieng and his colleague are currently meeting Embassies and Senegalese civil society groups to denounce Wade's non-democratic reforms and his refusal to meet with his opposition. A former adviser of President Wade told Pol staff that the conditions under which Wade is creating the Senate is reminiscent of the African one-party state of the sixties where the Head of State distributed positions in Parliament to party members. He averred that this is a step backward and an implementation of an old idea of Wade's - to have a Senate that would be an assembly of "wise men" in the old African traditions of assemblies of the elderly.

So Many Questions, So Few Answers

4. (SBU) Many questions remain about a realistic role for the Senate, its structure and logistics. These include but are not limited to: what will the Senate do in terms of lawmaking, when will Wade appoint the remaining 65 Senators, where will they convene, where will their offices be located, what will be the internal rules of the Senate, what commissions will be set up, what will its relationship be with the National Assembly, how much will the

Senators be paid, what perks - such as cars and a petrol allowance - will be distributed, and which body will represent Senegal in international organizations such as the African Union?

PDS IS ITS OWN OPPOSITION

15. (SBU) These elections underline that the PDS is its own opposition in the current democratic process. The party consists of local barons who fight for control of political territories. The yardstick for measuring success is the capacity to mobilize people and to show that they provide unconditional support to Wade. These barons in return are rewarded with cabinet positions or by endorsement of their candidacies so that they can run in legislative or local elections. It is such fights at the local level that led the PDS to lose the Senate seat of Velingara, in Casamance, where local officials rebelled against Wade and refused to vote for his nominee. The PDS has threatened to punish those who orchestrated the rebellion. Though they did not lose other seats, it is clear that similar mini-uprisings occurred in other areas. AJ/PADS, the only significant opposition in these elections competed in 18 districts out of the 35 and in many places scored much higher than expected. For example in Kaolack, where they only have 24 municipal counselors they won 56 votes. One of the leaders of AJ told Pol staff that they had benefited from the dissident vote within the PDS.

A SUCCESSION VEHICLE

16. (SBU) In reality, the sole importance of the Senate lies in the fact that, in case of a Presidential vacancy, the President of the Senate would assume the duties of Head of State and have up to 90 days to organize elections. In effect, the Senate is a Chamber dominated by faithful PDS militants who are likely to rubber-stamp whichever succession scheme Wade will chose.

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A NATIONAL CONSENSUS IS IMPERATIVE

17. (SBU) Meanwhile, opposition leaders have met with civil society organizations to enlist their support for a national dialogue. Forum Civil, which is Senegal's leading organization in good governance, has suggested that grassroots groups be involved in the process so that the political elite does not remain aloof. Civil society groups are insisting on the need to open up public media to dissenting opinions, that constitutional rights to demonstrate be respected by administrative authorities, and that in the Senate a quota system be used to allow opposition parties to be meaningfully included in the mechanism of democratic institutions so that the opposition would have available options other than street demonstrations.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) Wade re-established the Senate not to provide checks and balances that is so lacking in Senegalese democracy, but to further divide forces within his party to concentrate more power in his hands. After his election in 2000, he declared that his ambition was to have his party rule the country for fifty years. Constitutional amendments and Institutional reforms undertaken by his administration have clearly weakened Senegal's democracy while seeking to give the PDS the means to retain power by enlarging its sociological base through a process known as "refoundation of the party" (Ref C). Many segments of society are today demanding that PDS return to a more open and consensus-based approach to government. Political organizations as well as labor unions and rural organizations have called for "Assises nationales" (national dialogue). The PDS has managed to "purchase" a majority of all elections by mobilizing significant financial resources to fund its campaigns and influence opponents and religious leaders. However, this artificially built majority is becoming fragile in the face of the deterioration of the purchasing power of the average Senegalese. A dialogue to build a new consensus on political and economic issues may soon be necessary if Wade is to avoid growing tension and conflict with vocal opposition parties and powerful union who are garnering support from citizens who can no longer cope with

inflationary pressures and believe that his Alternance has forgotten the poor.

SMITH